1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

place. The "arsenal" at Bendiyagalge is well seen in Plate XIX, figures 1 and 2, while at Pihilegodagalge all the bows and arrows were rested on an old ant heap in the centre of the cave.

Though men do sometimes dig for yams, hunting is essentially their work, and yams were usually dug by the women who also do the cooking. This is of the simplest kind; yams are roasted in ashes, in which way meat may also be cooked, while practically everything else is boiled in a pot over three stones. Many Veddas also know how to cook curry, and deer's flesh is dried on a rack and smoked. A rack is built usually in a sunny place, the meat is put on this and a smoky fire kept burning beneath it, the flesh is thus dried in the sun and smoked simultaneously. This process is usually superintended by men.

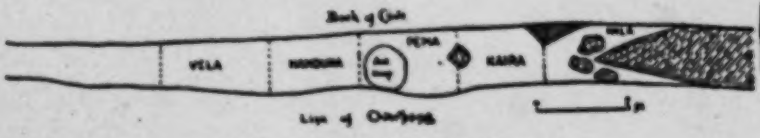

Fig. 9. Plan of Pihilegodagalge.

Plate XVII, figure 1, shows a rack built to smoke meat on the top of the Bendiyagalge rock-mass.

A Vedda will never sleep on the ground if there is any rock upon which he can lie. If he has a deerskin or a piece of cloth he will lie on it, if not he does not seem to object to the cold rock, and so avoids contact with the ground damp from the heavy dews. He always keeps a small fire burning beside him; this was noticed by Nevill, who says: "A Vaedda never sleeps without a smouldering fire by his side. I am assured, should accident oblige them to do so, they have usually died from a fever caught by the omission[1]."

The Veddas are strictly monogamous, and we were able to confirm Bailey's observations as regards their marital fidelity. "Their constancy to their wives is a very remarkable trait in their character in a country where conjugal fidelity is certainly not classed as the highest of domestic virtues. Infidelity,

[1] *Taprobanian*, Vol. 1, Aug. 1886, p. 187.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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from trees. Besides the *bambara* other species including the small stingless bee supply a considerable quantity. The first two months of our sojourn in the Vedda country (January and February) was at a time when honey was particularly scarce, and even at the end of March and in April it was not abundant, yet such was the courtesy of the Veddas that each community managed to make us a small present of honey, though this often entailed a long search and the combs were frequently full of grubs. In two communities only, which were better off than the others, namely Danigala and Kulukalaeba, were we given large pots of strained honey, the remains of the previous year's store.

The manner in which *bambara* colonies are regarded as property has been discussed in Chapter V. Writing in 1886 Nevill says, "Honey forms a great part of their diet. It is eaten fresh in large quantities, wax and all; combs with young bees in them being considered especially wholesome. It was also the practice formerly to store strips of dried meat in honey, filling in a cavity of some tree with it, the cavity being first lined with clay. At present they barter away their surplus meat and honey, during the hunting season, and keep no store for the rainy season. This often brings privation and is one cause of the rapid decrease in their numbers.

"They tell me their health is never so good as when their food largely consists of yams and honey.

"To procure honey they rapidly cut open hollow trees, even of the hardest wood; and to take the hives of the large black bambara bee, they make long ladders of cane, called 'rang kendiya,' by which they descend precipices, and cut off the combs adhering to their sides.

"They do this at night, generally, as the bees are not so savage then; and smoke them with a sort of resin. The hives are often cut off with a sort of wooden sword, made for the occasion. These frail ladders swing fearfully, and the task is so dangerous, only the boldest and most athletic attempt it. While engaged on the task they sing lustily, songs specially made, which appease the spirit of the rock, and prevent him from dashing the hunter off the ladder. They also go about

2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

222 to catch the hum of bees, which so instantaneously struck his ear. Their forest life naturally quickens their powers both of seeing and hearing, and renders them, in these respects, far superior to those whose more civilized lives do not compel them to rely on those faculties for their daily food.

They take honey in the manner common to the Singhalese. The bee-hunter enlarges with his small axe the hole in the tree at which the bee enters, and putting his mouth to the aperture, blows into it. This has generally the effect of making the bees fly out; or, at least, of making them vacate the comb, and retire into the innermost recesses of the hollow tree, when the honey can be taken with the hand. If this do not succeed, however, a second puff, after the bee-hunter has chewed some aromatic substance, has the desired effect.

Taking the honey of the bambera (*apis Indica*), a large and 222 very venomous bee, is a much more serious affair. This bee hives 283 on very lofty trees, or in clefts of precipitous rocks. If on a 481 tree, the hunter ties tendrils to it, and armed with a bundle of blazing faggots, climbs to the vicinity of the comb and smokes the bees out, being often severely stung during the operation. If in a cleft of rock, he will, if he cannot otherwise approach it, lower himself with ropes made of creepers, and take the honey by the same process.

To the Veddahs, honey is not only favourite food, but valuable 439 as an object of barter, for the Kandyans prize it greatly for medicinal purposes. They use it, too, as Knox tells us, for pre- 251 serving flesh. "They cut a hollow tree and put honey in it, and then fill it with flesh, and stop it with clay, which lyes for a reserve to eat in time of want."* And when they are short of food, they mix honey with decayed wood, and so eat it. It 261 satisfies their craving more readily than plain honey. Davy properly describes the practice, as "not so much for nourishment as to distend the empty stomach and to allay the distressing feelings of emptiness and the pains of hunger." It is curious that Tennent should have entirely omitted all allusion to this remarkable custom. "Romba" is the term used by the Veddahs, for this decayed wood, and the practice I have described may have given rise to the epithet, which Knox applies to the "wild sort" called "Ramba Veddahs," who, he says, "never shew themselves" —but no "sort" is so called now, nor is the name remembered.†

* Knox, part iii, chap. i, p. 63.

† Knox, part iii, chap. i, p. 63. The wood so used is chiefly that of the [824] eriminia creeper (*zizyphus œnophlia*, Mill.), the ettamba—wild mango (*mangifera Indica*, Quin.), the weera (*hemicyclia sepiaria*, W. and A.), the rôna, the nooga, a species of fig; any wood, indeed, not poisonous, is used. They reject the wood of the kaduru (*cerbera odallum*, Gœstn.), the goda

and ear-rings and necklaces. Sober, wistful children ate raw melons or fragments of *kurrukkan* cake as hard as brick, plastered over with flies.

Indian corn and *kurrukkan*, the staple food of these people, are prepared in a variety of ways. After soaking in water for twenty-four hours, they are reduced to flour, *kurrukkan* on grind-stones, maize with pestle and mortar, and eaten in one of three forms—*talapa*, *roti*, or *pittu* appetised with pungent sambols.

Let us look into one of their homes. It is windowless and dark, except for the light that comes between the bark-slats in a hundred dazzling shafts. There are two rooms; the inner small and narrow, the outer a larger living room with a single doorway protected by a two foot fence—a provision for the children. At one corner is a hearth underlying a low trestle bridging the wall angle, for drying flesh; at another a cage-work containing earthen pots and garish Allervale cups and plates. Hanging about the walls are rolled mats, oil bottles, baskets and clusters of sheathed corn cobs. Head-high is an open ceiling containing a jumble of things such as an old umbrella, wicker baskets, large earthen pots and gourds. On the floor is a large grind-stone, and littered about are shreds of mats, a deer skin or two, dirty cloths, a small pillow, a betel bag, a rush broom and a polished plank—certainly the most primitive chair imaginable. There is also a coconut-scraper of curious design, made of a serrated iron disc wedged into the outstanding limb of a triple-branched stem resting on its Y-shaped arms. Such are the appointments of a *chena* Vedda's domicile.

These communal dwellings stockaded against beast aggression in the heart of wild nature, the watch huts on the trees, the hallos all night, proclaim the incessant struggle between man and the animals in whose strong kingdom he is only a small unit. But for its inalienable hardships the life of this people makes a homely appeal to the human heart. Nature a capricious giver, bestows now abundantly now sparingly, and he who would wrest a living from her must have supple thews and great endurance.

Henanagalla was a place of antiquarian interest a few miles from Dolagalwella. On the summit of a large low rock in an undulating glade stood a broken dagaba completely obscured by a growth of big trees and scrub. Desultory worshippers had trussed up a slab for offerings of wild flowers. A low wall of hewn granite blocks surrounded the structure, and a half buried monolith or two peeped out of the ruin.

Descending from here and working round through a tangle of brush-wood, we came to a commodious cave quite forty paces long, showing the remains of enclosing and partitioning walls, a slotted stone for the support of a pillar and a large flat *puja* stone.

Besides these evidences of ancient occupation, were signs of more recent use. The cave was obviously a resort of monitor hunters. There were the long sticks with which the savoury creatures had been poked out of deep lairs, and cooking frames where they had been roasted. The floor was littered with their dry heads, corn-cobs and nut-shells.

But more interesting than all this were the crude drawings that adorned the inner dome. Here was a veritable gallery of untutored art, wrought with finger for brush and a mixture of ash and water for paint. There were the most primitive representations imaginable of leopards, elephants

3. A VEDDA OF DIVULANA

DIVULANA was recompense for our toil. The irrigation bungalow, placed high above the bund, over-looked the beautiful hill-encircled tank, whose glassy surface was broken by stones and snags on which cormorants and darters sunned.

Two miles within the forest lived Naga-Kauwa, a witless dwarf of fifty, the sole Vedda of Divulana. Born in Kovil Vannami, he came as a child to the Rasagala caves, of which in their best day his people occupied four or five. Now he and his family alone survived. Three years ago he had abandoned cave life for that of the *chena* ; and there we found him amidst his cassava and the tender teak he nursed for a consideration from Government.

His stalwart sons—quite unlike the father—brought us some yams, a mouse deer and a primitive drum—the broken-off rim of an earthen pot covered with wanderoo skin and fitted with a taut fibre.

Kauwa's hut was a thing to behold. The Tamils had said, "See Kauwa, this is the way to build a house" ; and Kauwa had built this crazy thing a child of twelve might have bettered. The thatch was a medley of dry grass and bark ; the walls were of wattle, which stuck out untrimmed through the roof, and bark slats so poorly fitted together that there was more aperture than cover. The structure was no more than four-foot square and two-storied at that ; merely a covered trestle three feet off the ground. In the lower floor his wife and children lay huddled like rats ; on the upper, its irregularities smoothed with bundles of rush (primary elements of a mat), the lord and master slept. Such was the caveman's first attempt at fashioning an abode. By the entrance was a fireplace, and, scattered about, were the bones of monkeys and monitor lizards and the carapaces of tortoises that had served for food. Stuck in the roof was a broken comb of buffalo horn, true touch of civilisation, for the test of a real Vedda is that his hair must be stranger to a comb.

Getting information from Kauwa was like squeezing water out of a stone ; he could no more describe the simplest thing than he could fly. Still, patience does much and this is what we gleaned :

Tortoises and pangolins are considered good eating by the Veddas ; but the porcupine they abhor, calling it a *rodiya* among beasts, and only killing it to give to their dogs. Why Veddas never eat porcupine I have not been able to ascertain : it is said that, in the old lawless days, they would go the length of burning down a Sinhalese hut in which they discovered a porcupine being cooked. Pork they love because it clears the blood, and one or two pigs a month the Vedda must have. Venison causes itching and is not so good !

Vedda cookery, simple in the extreme, can still boast some tasty dishes. *Gona-perume* is a sausage consisting of alternate layers of sambur meat and fat. *Le-perume* is the same, with the addition of a third layer of blood-clot. *Goa-thel-perume* is made by skinning the monitor's meaty

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

tail through a dorsal slit, partially separating the muscle mass from the caudal vertebrae, and introducing into the space thus formed strips of fat from the animal's flank; the skin is then sewn over with bast strip and thorn, and the stuffed tail is roasted on embers and eaten forthwith, or smoked and put by for future use. 252 262 251

Young hornbills being full of fat are a special Vedda delicacy; nor is the helpless imprisoned mother spared. Even more cruel is the treatment by these merciless epicures of the young of the edible-nest swiftlet. I asked Kauwa what he did with these when out nesting. "Eat them," he said; "the eggs are small but tasty; and so are the young which cry 'ki-ki-ki' as we put them in the fire." 262

The Vedda custom of preserving venison in honey is well known. This is how it is done: Into a hollow in a rock a little honey is poured; to this is added a few pieces of venison cut up small (pork is unsuitable as the fat prevents permeation); more honey is then poured on, and more meat added; and so layer by layer, till honey and meat are well intermingled. A protecting slab is then placed over the mouth of the hole. 251

Boa fat is said to be good for fractures; the broken limb being wrapped in *riti* bark or cloth saturated with the heated oil. They say it takes a month and a half for a fracture to heal; and in this, show more good sense than certain credulous Sinhalese who assure one that their *vedaralas* can cure a fracture in the time it takes a pot of rice to boil! 752

Kauwa had many charms against wild beasts. The one for buffaloes made them bleed from mouth and nose and fall dead! If you saw a bear you should *think* the appropriate charm and tie a knot in your hair; only if the animal attacked should you shout the words. For the leopard, he had no charm: "Cha, what's the use of that," he said; "the animal is more frightened of us than we of him." 777

Of Vedda heroes, there was Yapal whose voice could be heard a hundred miles; and Balagala-seya whose arm was like a tree, who carried a bow the girth of a man's thigh, and whose arrow would go through anything; in yonder Balagala rock he lived. 773

Their dead they cover with leaves and abandon where they die, or deposit in shallow graves covered over with earth and thorns to keep the pigs away. 764

Kauwa never bathed; he confirmed the assertion by rubbing rolls of dirt off his abdomen. "Does your wife not complain," we asked. "If she did," was the characteristic reply, "I would strike her with my axe-head, and ask her why she did not think of that when she came to me." 515

Vedda nuptials are not burdened with ritual: A prospective husband, having gained the consent of the girl's parents, returns a few days later, it may be with a friend, and perhaps a monitor or two. Placing his bow and arrows on the roof of the hut, he enters. All partake of the feast of lizards and yams; the girl, seated next to her man, doles out his food, not partaking of a morsel until he has fed, and she has given him a chew of betel and water to wash his hands. The man usually throws in his lot with his father-in-law, but sometimes he takes the girl away, leaving a couple of arrows behind in exchange. The girl's parents may accompany them some distance saying by way of adieu, "Take our child and keep her well." In custom we may differ from these wild and simple folk, but in affection and solicitude are one. 583 585 591

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

224 descend; while two or three others, with perhaps a dog, beat the jungle above and start the animal, which is shot almost at the point of the guns.

267 224 There is no flesh the Vedda loves more than that of the wanderoo (grey langur). He will sometimes be seen to halt by a tree, and strike its trunk three resounding blows with his axe-head. This is to discover the whereabouts of the wanderoo. On hearing the sound, these animals, imagining it to be that of a falling tree or rock, give vent to the "a-he-hik" so characteristic of them when startled.

252 [482] One afternoon Suthu Banda brought in a great langur slung on his shoulder, with its tail rove through its slit cheek. Within twenty-five minutes not a morsel of the animal remained. Disjointing the tail at the root, he dissected up a strip of dorsal skin in continuation of it as far as the neck; twisting this over a branch, he suspended and rapidly skinned the quarry. The meat was cut up in pieces and placed on large logs over a fire, the flames licking them all round. Bony segments, such as the spine, ribs and limbs, were pounded on a stone when half burnt, and then replaced on embers. The stomach and entrails were slit open and their contents merely scooped away with the fingers, and roasted. No water whatever was used! It was a truly sickening sight to see the relish with which the intestines with adherent faecal matter 262 were greedily eaten. When we remarked on the repulsiveness of it, the gluttonous epicure calmly remarked, "Yes, the filth gets eaten right enough. What of it? It is good medicine. If you get a wanderoo what haven't you got? No marriage is like it." How true is the saying that the pig and the Vedda are one!

226 824 Fish* abound in the forest streams, all bony and very indifferent to the taste. The Veddas catch these, not with rods or nets, but with poisons. The fruit, bark or root of certain trees† is smashed up and thrown into pools or banked waterways. The water is then stirred; as it gets stained the fish become restless, and leap on to the bank, or turn belly upwards stupefied. They are collected and boiled with a [251 252] little salt and a few chillies and eaten at once, or dried over a trestle like meat.

222 Let us see what sort of fare the jungle trees provide. Of fruit there is plenty in season:—*Mora*, *kong*, *galseembela*, *veera*, *palu*, *damba*, jak, guavas, *ulkantha*, *kibuloo*, *bulanga*, *kothalanga*, *leyaneya*, *karambe*, *madu* never eaten raw because it causes giddiness and vomiting!). The cabbages of palms such as *inthibada* and *kitulalla*. Yams:—*Gonala*, *katuala*, *kirathala*, *alalla*, in order of preference. Then there are the [261] various barks they chew incessantly to stay the hunger of their long fasts:—*Demata*, *bolvilla* and *thambola*, all substitutes for betel; and *davata* for arecanut; and besides these the barks of *opulu*, *galseembela*, *mora*, *habatha*, *nuga*, *kalawa*, *galkara*, and in fact anything, however, insipid, provided it is not poisonous.

757 752 Their medicines are few. There is *gonkuttudalu* which they crush up with water and apply to the head for headaches; *meelalla-pothu* which they smash up with *chunam* and use as a dressing for wounds; but for abrasions of the foot they will as soon rub in a little sand with

* *Walapotho*, *angulwo*, *hulo*, *kaluhanso*, *kanupatho*, *anlho* (eels), *magwro*, *kungo*, *kebeliyo*, *pethy*, *walikondo*, *sithalu*, *badapathalo*, *walihairiyo*, *pinisweliyo*, *kovalayo*, *gaipanduruo*.

† *Kukurumang-gedde*, *kala-mul*, *thimbiri-gedde*, *dhamba-pothu*, *pussai-mul*.